

Lessons Learned Record of Interview

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SIGAR Attendees:	Candace Rondeaux, Matthew Sternenberger			
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Prepared By: (Name, title and date)	Matthew Sternenberger, Research Analyst, 7/15/2015			
Reviewed By: (Name, title and date)	Candace Rondeaux, 7/15/2015			
Key Topics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments and Reports • Understanding Conflict: Data Collection and Portraits • Organization of the NSC and the Role of the SRAP • Structure of the NSC • NSPD-44 and Limited Human Capacity • Corruption and the Rule of Law • Strategic Reviews and Barriers to Progress • COIN vs. CT 			

Introduction

SIGAR gave a brief introduction regarding the background of the Lessons Learned program and its effort to contextualize Afghanistan. It was further noted that our report seeks to describe a comprehensive, retrospective review of strategy and planning. Our focus is the NSC and the OMB as the arbiters of the interagency process. We are also looking at changes that were made to improve the process and how those changes played out on the ground.

Discussion

Assessments and Reports

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District Assessments (DAs) (b)(1) - 1.4(d)

(b)(5)

These DAs were good because of their long term nature and how they identify trend lines over time. While they were valuable, they were some consistent critiques. One critique was with how the districts were coded as either government controlled, insurgent controlled, or disputed. Some wanted to see another category of "no data available" because having 400 districts with great data is unbelievable.

Every time a think tank (such as ICG, ISW, Brookings or USIP) published a report, it went to the NSC. The staff would read them, or at least the executive summaries, and send a short brief of a sentence or two up the chain. The accumulative affect of all these reports did show what was going on in Afghanistan. I would also meet with some of these groups firsthand for informal chats.

Understanding Conflict: Data Collection and Portraits

In 2007 we were that PRTs had detailed questionnaires to allow them to touch the local level regarding life in the districts and the temperature of the people. I asked where all this information was going and no one knew and I never ended up finding out. The PRT efforts was to capture data at a very local level (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) and this created a huge disconnect; a disconnect which may have fed into a disagreement with the institutional bureaucracy over potential resources.

The portraits were a standard, usually half-page profile describing [Afghan] leaders. It included a big photo, general information, details on their negotiation style, (b)(1) - (1.4)(d)

These were good for [U.S. Officials] as no one could remember all the leaders and these were used before every meeting or call.

Organization of the NSC and the Role of the SRAP

Originally the director for Iraq and Afghanistan was under Lute, which was before my arrival. Iraq and Afghanistan remained together until the end of [President George W] Bush. [President Barack] Obama moved Iraq to the near east and then put Afghanistan together with Pakistan. (b)(5)

Putting the region as a whole into one shop would have made more sense.

(b)(5)

Structure of NSC

(b)(5)

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We need a worldwide planning board at the senior level with a global writ. This group would develop guidance and send it to the NSC and then up to the DC for oversight. The DC should just do program implementation and oversight. [This worldwide planning board] would consist of the lead planners at each agency or department. No legislative changes would be required, simply a re-write of the NSPD [or whatever the relevant administration labeled them]. Usually, this is the first NSPD. Since 1989, this document has been basically copy and pasted off Scowcroft's original text. We would not need new legislation, simply the executive order. There is no assurance that this change would stay. There were a lot of changes between 1961 and 1989 and none of those changes ever worked really well. It was because of the Tower Commission post-Iran-Contra that the need to overall the NSC was articulated and eventually passed the George H.W. Bush administration [and Scowcroft].

NSPD-44 and Limited Human Capacity

There is no evidence that NSPD-44 was guiding agency behavior or how they were doing business. There also were no negative references to it. State was not capable of leading the interagency effort. It is an NSC thing. We don't have something similar to the ODNI on top (or the communication management office). State doesn't have an office to coordinate all international aid or resources overseas. For example, [the Department of] Agriculture and [the Department of] Treasury both had foreign services and had people in Afghanistan. State was in charge but did not have resources or ability to control these people. In addition, State was resistant to forward planning and lacks an expeditionary mindset. In order for them to have this [expeditionary mindset] they would need to be much larger, but just can't do it with current mindset.

State needs more foreign area officers and peoples who know the humanities, not political science. They need people that know languages, religions and are comfortable overseas. Right now most head overseas to stamp passports for a few years then are sent back and stuck in Foggy Bottom - this is not what we need. There is also a growth of insta-experts on Afghanistan. These people believe in clichéd ideas (like Afghanistan is the graveyard of empires, or that Afghans are legendary xenophobic or hostile) that are just wrong.

Corruption and the Rule of Law

The I.C. was totally aware of this problem. Task Force Shafafiyat was after my time, but it was the effort by ISAF to tackle this problem. It was a lot of handwrapping and finger pointing, but there was little recognition of the problem of corruption's actual growth due to a lot of money in a weak state. (b)(1) - (1.4)(d)

My harshest criticism is our dereliction of duty on developing capacity and building institutions. We are allergic to building institutions in foreign states. \$105 billion in total investment in Afghanistan, two-thirds of which went to the army and police, but very little went to building governance. What was spent on governance was for elections and voter registration. There was only a little money going toward building the ministries ("the boring stuff") despite them being the most important. We need to build institutions of state to enforce the rule of law. The (b)(1) - (1.4)(d) and the U.S. dropped the ball.

Strategic Reviews and Barriers to Progress

In 2003 Khalilzad conducted a review and we saw the Accelerating Success Initiative. It said we needed *more time, money, and resources*. In the 2006 review, it said we needed *more time, money, and resources*. In the 2008 review it said we needed *more time, money and resources*. In the 2009

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review it said we need a fully resourced CT mission and *more time, money and resources*. In the early years it was Iraq, Iraq, Iraq, but that shifted. We always knew what needed to be done we just did not do it. [There are three barriers to actually getting the right things done.

1. Iraq sucked the area out of the room and sucked the money from Congress.
2. Disbelief in our own capabilities and pessimism that stability can't be done in Afghanistan; that Afghanistan was too weak or too poor for stability. This was a general disbelief in the possibility of success.
3. Disbelief in the relevancy of doing more than kill bad guys; the idea of the fuzzy stuff was irrelevant.

COIN vs. CT

In 2006-2008 there was an increasing belief to move to COIN. [REDACTED] spoke the language but his attempts were done with limited resources. Again Iraq took troops and in 2009 Obama did a pump-fake or a false start [on COIN]. In March 2009 the need was articulated in Riedel's report and then in December 2009 Obama was talking of COIN-light and continued to maintain that we are not doing nation-building. Obama lost faith on the policy. He did not think it was possible with any amount of time and thus the drawdown timeline. Obama wanted to be seen as doing "enough" effort before pulling out and thus did his strategic review but did not implement it. The main resource which he deprived of effort was time and the drawdown timeline was one of the biggest errors.

We must do COIN and we can't say that Afghanistan disagrees with COIN theory because it was never really implemented and fully resourced. No [COIN] manual tells you to implement it the way we did. Overall our effort was bumbling and half-hearted and COIN needed to be started on day one.

It is fine if we are only going to do a CT mission if we are content with a worldwide assassination capability to kill those we unilaterally deem to be terrorists. This is the "forever war" brand.